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TWO INDEXICAL THEORIES OF NAMES

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**Abstract**

In this paper I argue that there is no motivation to support the Strong Indexical Theory of Names as opposed to its counterpart the Weak Indexical Theory of Names. The Strong Indexical Theory, as proposed by Pelczar, argues that names are indexicals. According to Pelczar, names are context-sensitive to an antecedently performed speech-act, which fixes the referent in that context. However, the content of ambiguous terms can also be fixed by a speech-act, and so according to the strong theory ambiguous terms are indexicals. Furthermore, the meaning of any term can also shift over time and thus unambiguous terms could potentially become ambiguous in the future. Hence, I argue that all terms, ambiguous and unambiguous, are indexicals according to the Strong Indexical Theory of Names. However, indexicals are different from other terms in that the content of an indexical is determined through a single social convention, while the content of all other terms, including names, are determined through two social conventions. Thus, as I argue, names are in the same semantic category as ambiguous terms, which is the main thesis of the Weak Indexical Theory of Names. Moreover, the Strong Indexical Theory claims to resolve the problem of propositional attitudes through an appeal to the reflexive character of names. Yet, the weak alternative also agrees that names have a reflexive character and can also resolve the problem through the same method. In the end, there is no motivation to support the strong theory as opposed to the Weak Indexical Theory of Names.

## **1. Introduction**

The Direct Reference Theory of Names argues that names directly refer to the object, which they name in all possible worlds. The name is fixed to the object at some naming ceremony. Any person who uses the name to refer to the object should intend to use it in the same way as it was used in the naming ceremony. However, as Gareth Evans argues, the referent of some names can change over time. In an attempt to respond to this objection to the Direct Reference Theory, the Indexical Theory of Names was developed. The name of the theory comes from a comparison between names and indexicals. Names are similar to indexicals in that they both have two levels of meaning and a reflexive character. Indexicals have a character and a content, and names have a linguistic and a non-linguistic meaning. A reflexive character means that when the referent of the name or indexical is unclear, the hearer can still determine the truth conditions of the statement. The theory offers a successful resolution to Evans' objection by arguing that the referent of the name can be determined by the context of the utterance, similar to an utterance with an indexical. Yet there are two alternatives to the indexical theory of names: the strong version and the weak version. First, the weak version argues that names are similar to indexicals, but are not indexical. Rather, names are more similar to ambiguous terms. On the other hand, the strong theory claims that names are indexicals. Pelczar offers a direct argument for the indexicality of names and three subsequent arguments against the weak theory.

In this paper I will argue that if the strong theory is correct, and names are indexical, then all ambiguous terms are also indexical. This is because ambiguous terms are sensitive to the definition, namely the definition that the speaker appeals to.

Furthermore, all terms might have multiple meanings in the future and for this reason all terms could be ambiguous and thus indexical. However, this is an untenable consequence that the Strong Indexical Theory of Names cannot hold because there is something distinct about indexicals. The difference, I argue, is that names and ambiguous terms are doubly conventional while pure indexicals are singly conventional. Thus names are not indexicals, but they are more like ambiguous terms. Hence, the strong theory's claim that names are indexical is to no avail. Furthermore, I show that the problem of propositional attitudes, that the Strong Indexical Theory of Names claims to resolve, can also be dealt with by the weak theory through the same strategy. Finally, I respond to Rami's objection to the weak theory, saying that there is an equivocation between the linguistic and non-linguistic meaning of a name. In the end, there is no reason to favor the strong theory as opposed to the Weak Indexical Theory of Names.

## **2. The Direct Reference Theory of Names**

Saul Kripke developed the Direct Reference Theory of Names in his seminal work *Naming and Necessity*.<sup>1</sup> In this work, he purports that names directly refer to the same object in all possible worlds. This view is opposed to the descriptivist theory that claims a name is able to pick out its referent through some intermediate sense. Kripke proposes the modal, semantic, and epistemic arguments against descriptivism, which demonstrate that the sense of a name is unable to uniquely identify the referent. He proposes that names do not have a meaning, or sense, but simply rigidly designate the same object across all possible worlds.

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<sup>1</sup> Kripke (1980)

How the name comes to designate the referent is a question that Kripke does not directly answer. However, in a footnote he gives a rough outline of the causal theory of how the name becomes fixed with the referent. He suggests that there is an initial baptism of the object, and the name is fixed to the referent by the description.<sup>2</sup> During this initial baptism the description is not synonymous with the name, as in descriptivism, but instead is used to fix the name with the referent. For instance, when a baby is born, there is a ceremony where the parents baptize the child with the name. Yet, the only way to fix the name to the child is through some description or demonstration, e.g. this child here (pointing to the child). During this naming ceremony the description is not synonymous with the name, but it is simply used to fix the referent.

Once the name of the referent is fixed, then the causal chain begins. Those who were present at the baptism will pass on the name to those who were not present, and so on. When the name is passed on from one person to the next, Kripke thinks that the receiver must intend to use the same referent as the person who told it to him.<sup>3</sup> If this link is kept strong and those who use the name all have the same referent, then it does not matter if the description of the referent is incorrect. For instance, when we talk about Benjamin Franklin, so long as the referent remains fixed, then it is not important if our description of him is complete or accurate. However, we have quite a bit of difficulty keeping the name and the reference fixed. Kripke gives the example of the names 'St. Nicolas' and 'Santa Claus' as an instance of how the referent can change over time. At one point in time, the two names referred to the same person, but over time a disconnect

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<sup>2</sup> Kripke (1980) p. 96

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

grew. Gareth Evans uses this inconsistency to note a potential problem for Kripke's theory of names.<sup>4</sup>

Evans acknowledges that Kripke does not fully endorse the causal theory, but Evans uses the rough outline as a starting point. His objection to the causal theory is that it cannot account for instances when the referent of the name shifts. He uses the example of Madagascar to demonstrate how the referent of a name can shift. The natives of Africa use the name 'Madagascar' to refer to the part of the African mainland. When Marco Polo traveled to this part of the world, he came to learn how the native inhabitants used the name. Later, through a miscommunication with Malay or Arab sailors, the name became used to designate the island off the coast of Africa. This miscommunication between Marco Polo and the other sailors led to the name 'Madagascar' designating the island. According to Evans, the causal theory of names is not able to account for this shift since the name was fixed at the initial baptism. Evans says, "The intention of the speakers to use the name to refer to something must be allowed to count in determination of what it denotes."<sup>5</sup> He suggests that something more than the initial baptism is needed to ground the name to the referent, which, in this case, is the speaker's intention. The Indexical Theory of Names purports to resolve this issue by making the referent of the name sensitive to context.

### **3. Content and Character**

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<sup>4</sup> Evans (1973) (1980)

<sup>5</sup> Evans (1973) p. 196

Before I expand on the Indexical Theory of Names, I first need to explain David Kaplan's theory of indexicals and his use of the character content distinction. When I say the phrase 'I am hungry' it expresses something different than when you say 'I am hungry'. Clearly we have said two different things if the truth value is different, but in this instance we each might have said something different despite them both being true. The difference in this circumstance is what Kaplan calls the content. He defines content as a "function from circumstances of evaluation to an appropriate extension."<sup>6</sup> So the content of the sentence,

(1) John went snowboarding today

is  $\langle \text{John, went, snowboarding, 3/25/2015} \rangle$ . If you wanted to express the same content the next day, you would have to say

(2) John went snowboarding yesterday

The content of this latter sentence is the same as the former even though the verbal expressions are different.

The character of a word is generally thought of as the meaning because most words have the same content in all contexts. This is called a constant character and a constant content. So in all context and circumstances of evaluation the word has the same extension. However, indexicals have a non-constant content because their content changes from context to context. From above, the contents of (1) and (2) are the same, but the character of the terms 'today' and 'yesterday' are different. Both of these terms have a constant character that is able to determine the content. Kaplan notes that character is neither directly referential nor always able to determine the content in each

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<sup>6</sup> Kaplan p. 502



context.<sup>7</sup> By this he means that there are situations when the character of a word fails to pick out the content. For instance, if you came across a piece of paper with the sentence

(3) 'I like snowboarding'

written on it, from this context it is not possible to determine the extension of this sentence, nor is it possible to determine the referent. The character of this sentence is  $\langle$ the writer of this sentence, likes, snowboarding,  $t_1\rangle$ . The Indexical Theory of Names makes use of this distinction between character and content and purports that names have a similar distinction. A proper name has two meanings: the linguistic and the non-linguistic meaning. The linguistic meaning is similar to the character, and the non-linguistic meaning is similar to the content.

#### **4. Indexical Theory**

Paula Milne gives a general summary of the indexical theory in her paper *To What Extent Do Proper Names Resemble Indexicals?*<sup>8</sup> She suggests that there are two main versions to indexical theories, what I call the Strong Indexical Theory and the Weak Indexical Theory. The strong alternative purports that names are indexicals, while the weak version claims that names are indexical-like, but not indexicals. The former thinks that names are context sensitive to the dubbing-in-force (I will explain this term later in Section 7 of this paper), similar to how 'I' is sensitive to the utterer or 'now' is sensitive to the time of the utterance. The latter theory argues that context is used to narrow down the possible content of the name in an utterance, more similar to how context helps to

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<sup>7</sup> Kaplan p. 505

<sup>8</sup> Milne (2005)

determine the meaning of an ambiguous term. Both of these versions of the indexical theory agree that names and indexicals both have a reflexive character. Reflexive character means that the hearer of an utterance might not be able to determine the content of the statement, but they would be able to understand the truth conditions that would make the statement true. The reflexive character is employed for indexicals when the hearer is not sure who or where or when the statement was uttered, and for names when the referent of the name is unclear to the hearer.

Take, for example, the sentence,

(4) Barack Obama likes dogs.

This sentence is true iff there is a person and this person bears the name 'Barack Obama' that is causally linked to the person through a naming ceremony, and that person also likes dogs. The linguistic meaning of the name 'Barack Obama' is that there is a person who bears this name and this person may or may not have the property of liking dogs. The linguistic-meaning does not require that the person have the property of liking dogs. This is only important for the truth conditions of a sentence with a name. The non-linguistic meaning of 'Barack Obama' is that there is a person who is causally linked to the name through a naming ceremony. Similar to sentence (3), even if the referent of the name is unclear, the truth conditions of the sentence are apparent, namely (4) is true iff there is a person who bears the name Barack Obama and that person likes dogs. So, an understanding of the sentence does not require that the hearer have an acquaintance with the referent, but that the hearer understands that 'Barack Obama' is a name and that a social convention is being employed.

Along with giving a linguistic meaning of names, the indexical theory is able to account for the problem of shifting reference. The indexical theory says that the referent of a name is determined by the context of the current situation. Since, for instance, the current social convention associated with 'Madagascar' refers to the island, when the name is used it refers to the island. However, if someone wanted to specify that they were referring to the part of the mainland, then they would be expected to explicitly say something to the effect of, 'the part of the mainland formerly known as Madagascar'. In this context, the reference of the sentence is fixed.

### **5. John Perry's Theory**

John Perry argues that names are similar but different from indexicals. First, he purports that names are similar to indexicals because in both cases context is used to determine the referent.<sup>9</sup> Each name is associated with many different people through different naming conventions. When the token of a name is used in a sentence the hearer might not be able to determine whom the sentence is designating. In a typical conversation, if someone says,

(5) Frank was brave

'Frank' could refer to any of the multitude of individuals with that name. But Perry follows the Gricean conversational maxims, namely quality and relation. The maxim of relation stipulates that the interlocutors should only make relevant comments. So when the audience hears this utterance, they should assume that the speaker is talking about a Frank that they mutually know. Furthermore, the maxim of quality requires that the

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<sup>9</sup> Perry p. 7

interlocutors tried to be truthful. So if they mutually know more than one person named Frank, then the audience should assume that the speaker is referring to the Frank that did something brave. But, again, if the referent of the sentence is still not clear, then Perry suggests that the audience ask whom the speaker is talking about.

Yet, Perry thinks that names are not indexicals because context is being used in a different way to determine the referent. For indexicals, it is the meaning of the word that determines the contextual relation between the utterance and the referent, e.g., the meaning of 'I' determines that the referent is the utterer or writer. On the other hand, names use context to narrow down the different possible naming conventions that the speaker is exploiting. This is what is happening in the example of Frank from above. Perry calls this ambiguity as opposed to indexicality,<sup>10</sup> because context is used in the same way as ambiguous terms.

## **6. Pelczar's Arguments for The Strong Indexical Theory of Names**

Pelczar offers a direct argument for the indexicality of names, and then offers three arguments against Perry's conclusion. The direct argument purports that there is a difference between ambiguous terms and names. Thus, names should not be considered to be ambiguous. Pelczar thinks that Perry's argument against the indexicality of names can be interpreted in three different ways: names are not indexicals because they lack specificity, are not tidy, and are underdetermined. Pelczar's three arguments show that there are some indexicals that do not meet these three criteria, yet are still considered

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<sup>10</sup> Perry p.7

indexicals. Since Perry's argument does not preclude indexicals that do not meet these criteria, proper names should not be precluded from being indexicals.

### 6.1 Direct Argument

Pelczar argues that there is a difference between ambiguous terms and names. For a person to be considered a competent user of an ambiguous term, such as bill, they do not need to understand all of the different meanings. For example, if a person did not understand the sentence 'The tractor drove over the bill', but did understand the meaning of the sentence 'I received a huge gas bill', then we would maintain that they are still a competent user of the term 'bill' in the latter sense. Meaning that if a person does not understand one use of a word it is not counted against his being a competent user of the term, so long as he understands one of the meanings of the term. On the other hand, if a person did not understand the meaning of the sentence using a name like 'Bill', we could count this one instance against him as not knowing the linguistic meaning of the name 'Bill'. In other words, if a person did not understand the meaning of a sentence with a name, because they did not understand that name, then this person does not understand the reflexive truth conditions of the name. For a person to be a competent user of a name they must be able to understand the linguistic meaning in more than one instance of the name. Pelczar argues that being a competent user of a name is similar to being a competent user of an indexical. If a person is a competent user of an indexical, they must be able to understand the meaning in more than one instance. Thus, Pelczar concludes that names are not simply ambiguous, but are actually indexicals.

## 6.2 Pelczar's Arguments Against Perry

Pelczar takes Perry to mean that names are different from indexicals because names lack specificity, are messy, and are underdetermined. First, each indexical has a different meaning that is able to determine the referent of the sentence. This idea opposes that of names, which have a general meaning that is able to determine the referent. Pelczar claims that this is not true for all indexicals such as 'this' and 'that'. These two indexicals have the same meaning that determines the referent. So the terms 'this' and 'that' have the same meaning, i.e. the object that the speaker is pointing to. Since a lack of specificity does not preclude these terms from being indexicals, Pelczar argues that it should not preclude names either.

Next, Pelczar takes Parry to argue that indexicals have a tidy rule that is able to pick out the referent, while names seem to be messy. Pelczar thinks that an appeal to social conventions to determine the referent "quickly leads to the consideration of multifarious factors, semantic, pragmatic, and even extra-linguistic, that, to say the least, resist tidy encapsulation."<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, the rules for indexicals are more candid. For instance, the rule for 'now' is the time of the utterance. However, Pelczar argues that not all indexicals have such orderly meanings. Consider the meaning of the term 'here', which is not so clearly defined. When a person says, "Steve lives here," it is not clear where 'here' is referring to, i.e. the room, the house, the town or the country in which the speaker is located. Since the vagueness of the meaning does not seem to preclude 'here' from being an indexical, Pelczar concludes that name should not be ruled out for this reason.

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<sup>11</sup> Pelczar (2001) p. 143

Finally, Pelczar takes Perry to argue that names are underdetermined and hence are not indexicals. Take the example (5) from above. In this example it is not clear to whom the speaker is referring and the audience is supposed to ask which Frank the speaker was referring to. In this instance, the name is underdetermined and the referent is identified by the speaker's intentions. On the contrary, indexicals are always supposed to determine the referent, e.g. 'I' always identifies the speaker.<sup>12</sup> But Pelczar argues that this is not the case for all indexicals, such as 'he'. The meaning of the term 'he' is the salient male, but the referent is not always salient. Suppose the speaker is comparing three males and says, "He is the strongest," The speaker's intentions might not be clear and the audience might have to ask to whom he is referring. Again, since indexicals like 'he' are not precluded from being indexicals because the referent is underdetermined, it follows that names should not be ruled out as being indexicals for this same reason.<sup>13</sup>

## **7. The Strong Indexical Theory of Names**

The character of a word depends on the kind of context to which an utterance might be sensitive. According to Kaplan, the character might be sensitive to four types of context: utterer, time, spatial position, and possible world.<sup>14</sup> So 'I' is sensitive to the utterer, 'now' is sensitive to the time, and so on. Pelczar suggested a fifth type of context

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<sup>12</sup> When a person uses the term 'I' they are referring to themselves. However, there are instances when a person is directly quoting another person and in this case 'I' is referring to the original utterer of the quote.

<sup>13</sup> Milne claims that Pelczar's objections to Perry's argument are based on a misinterpretation of *Reflexivity, Indexicality and Names*. Furthermore, she argues that Perry is able to answer these objections, although he has not directly addressed them himself.

<sup>14</sup> Kaplan p. 498

sensitivity. He says, “[T]he significance of an utterance sometimes depends on contextual factors determined by antecedently-performed speech acts.”<sup>15</sup> In this case the speaker makes a stipulation that is supposed to influence how the audience understands the ensuing statement(s). This stipulation is what Pelczar calls the ‘dubbing-in-force’. A dubbing is similar to Kripke’s naming ceremony, where a name is fixed to the referent. The dubbing is said to be ‘in force’ if the item that was named in that dubbing ceremony bears the name that it was given in that ceremony. Pelczar asserts, if dubbing-in-force is a kind of context sensitivity, then all words that are fixed by a dubbing ceremony – such as names – are indexical.

Pelczar says that the idea of dubbing-in-force is very complex and hence he does not give a systematic way to determine which dubbings are in force in a given context. Although, he notes that it cannot be the person who has been dubbed with a name at the time of an utterance because there will be countless people who have been dubbed with a name. It is when there is more than one dubbing-in-force that causes confusion. Confusions leads to problems like Hesperus and Phosphorus, since there are two dubbings-in-force for the same object. Similar to Perry, the audience can simply ask their interlocutor which dubbing is in force. When your interlocutor gives an answer, one of the contending dubbings-in-force becomes salient. Also, the dubbing-in-force might become salient through context of the conversation, taking for granted the Gricean maxims of conversation.

Pelczar looks at the Madagascar example from Evans’ objection, mentioned earlier in Section 2. He states that this example is clearer because the dubbings-in-force

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<sup>15</sup> Pelczar and Rainsbury (1998) p. 294



vary over time. Pelczar claims that indexicals are on a spectrum from high frequency of variability to low frequency of variability. He claims that indexicals either have *synchronic variability*, meaning it varies across contexts of utterance in the same time, or *diachronic variability*, meaning it varies over time.<sup>16</sup>

To say that a competent speaker knows the meaning of a name does not mean that they are required to know the referent of the name. This is because to understand the meaning of a sentence with an indexical, you do not need to understand the referent of the indexical. Rather to be a competent speaker of the language, you would only need to understand the character of the indexical. Similarly, Pelczar purports that when a competent speaker knows the meaning of a name, they understand that the name refers to the item that was named in the dubbing-in-force in the context of the utterance. In other words, when a competent speaker knows the meaning of a name, they only need to know the linguistic meaning and are not required to know the non-linguistic meaning.

## **8. Arguments Against The Strong Indexical Theory of Names**

First, I want to show that the Strong Indexical Theory of Names leads to the conclusion that all words are indexicals. By this, I mean to show that if the Strong Indexical Theory is correct and names are context sensitive to the dubbing-in-force, then other ambiguous terms are sensitive to the definition-in-force. Furthermore, even unambiguous terms could be sensitive to the definition-in-force and hence all terms are context sensitive and thus indexicals. However, the Strong Indexical Theory of Names

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<sup>16</sup> He does say that this list might not be exhausted. That is, indexicals might vary in some fashion other than synchronic or diachronic.

would need to give an explanation for the difference between pure indexicals and other terms. This explanation is that indexicals are singly conventional while other terms are doubly conventional. Thus, names, as being doubly conventional, are in the same category as ambiguous terms and not indexicals, which was the original position of the Weak Indexical Theory. My second objection to the Strong Indexical Theory of Names is that there is no motivation for supporting the strong alternative as opposed to the weak theory, because both theories agree with the linguistic meaning and reflexive truth conditions of both names and indexicals.

### 8.1 Strong Leads to Weak

The motivation for my first objection comes from Pelczar's argument that a name is sensitive to an antecedently performed speech act.<sup>17</sup> This sensitivity means that there are circumstances when a person might qualify their statement to direct the audience to a specific content. When a person qualifies their statement regarding a specific person to whom they are referring, it is called the "dubbing-in-force." For example, if the speaker wanted to refer to the Madagascar as the native Africans did, he would have to stipulate that he is referring to the part of the African mainland. In this circumstance, when the audience hears the name 'Madagascar' they understand that the name is referring to the part of the African mainland. Since the referent of the name is sensitive to stipulations of the speaker, Pelczar thinks that names should be considered indexicals.

Yet, a speaker can make stipulations about the meaning of any word in an utterance to ensure that the audience is directed to a specific content. Although this

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<sup>17</sup> Pelczar and Rainsbury (1998) p. 294

speech-act is not a dubbing-in-force (because dubbing only refers to a naming ceremony), it might be called something different – such as the “definition-in-force.” So the definition is the meaning of the word or phrase, and the definition is in force in a certain context if, in that context, the word bears the meaning of that definition. For instance, a speaker might say, “By key I mean the crucial step, and the key to opening the door is pulling the handle up before pushing the door open.” In this statement, the speaker stipulated that the definition-in-force for the term ‘key’ is the crucial step. So ambiguous terms are sensitive to the same antecedently performed speech act – the definition-in-force. Since terms are contextually sensitive to the definition-in-force, as names are sensitive to dubbings-in-force, then all potentially ambiguous terms are an indexical; that is, any term that has multiple and varying lexical meanings.

Furthermore, since the definition of a term can change over time, then any term could be ambiguous with respect to some future meaning. Suppose that there is a word that is unambiguous, that is, it has one and only one meaning.<sup>18</sup> Seeing as this word currently has only one meaning does not imply that in the future this word could not have more than one meaning. This multiplication of meanings is similar to the Madagascar example, in that the meaning of the word changes very slowly over time. So slow, in fact, that we have not seen it change yet, but this slow evolution does not mean that it will not change in the future. Thus, even terms that are not ambiguous (at least not ambiguous yet) would also be considered indexicals under the standards set by the Strong Indexical Theory of Names.

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<sup>18</sup> I say supposing there is such a terms, because I am not sure if any word has only one definition

So if we take names to be context sensitive to the dubbing-in-force, all terms are context sensitive with respect to some antecedent speech act. However, if all terms are indexical, then what makes pure indexicals (as Kaplan thought of them) different from other terms?<sup>19</sup> Pelczar says that the difference between names and pure indexicals is that names are connected to the referent through some social convention, the dubbing.<sup>20</sup> If we take the character of a word to be a social convention, then indexicals would also determine the referent through a convention. It follows that names are doubly conventional, that is, the referent is fixed through the antecedent speech act and through the character of the term, while only the character fixes the referent of the indexical. Similarly, all other terms would be doubly conventional, and the distinction between pure indexicals and other terms would be this level of social convention. Thus, names are in the same category as ambiguous terms while indexicals are different. Since this is the original thesis of the Weak Indexical Theory of Names, the strong theory's claim that names are indexical is to no avail.

## 8.2. The Indexical Theory of Names and Propositional Attitudes

One of the main motives for accepting the Strong Indexical Theory of Names is that it purports to explain the problem of propositional attitudes. A propositional attitude is a relation between a person's mental state and a proposition, e.g. Justin believes that P. The problem of propositional attitude is that some proposition that a person holds might be inconsistent. For example,

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<sup>19</sup> Kaplan thought that pure indexicals are terms such as 'I', 'Here', 'Now'

<sup>20</sup> Pelczar and Rainsbury (1998) p. 297-8

- (6) Justin believes that Bob Dylan has musical talent and that Robert Zimmerman does not have musical talent.

This belief is inconsistent because Bob Dylan and Robert Zimmerman are the same person. The problem of propositional attitudes is to explain how a coherent person can have inconsistent propositional attitudes. This is a problem that the direct reference theory is unable to resolve because names directly refer and can be substituted *salva veritate*.

Although this argument is not successful, it is worth noting that both indexical theories of names are able to resolve this issue through the same strategy. Pelczar argues that when an indexical is within a propositional attitude, the subject is not required to understand the non-linguistic meaning of the indexical or the content. Within a propositional attitude the subject is only required to know the character of the indexical. So take the sentence,

- (7) Mary believes that I am tall.

Mary can understand the meaning of this sentence without understanding the content of the sentence. Thus, Mary can understand the truth conditions of the sentence without understanding who is the referent of the indexical. Mary understands that (7) is true iff the utterer of the sentence is tall, without her knowing who uttered the sentence. Pelczar argues that this line of thought also applies to names in the same way. So for the sentence,

- (8) Mary believes that Tom Costigan is tall.

Pelczar thinks that for Mary to understand the meaning of this sentence, she only needs to understand the linguistic meaning of the name. For Mary to understand this sentence, she

needs to know that there is a person who was named ‘Tom Costigan’ in a naming ceremony and that that person is tall. So in statements like,

- (9) Thales believes that Hesperus is shining and disbelieves that Phosphorus is shining.<sup>21</sup>

Thales is coherent because he understands the linguistic meaning of the sentence, even though he does not know that both Hesperus and Phosphorus refer to the same object. So the solution to the puzzle, according to the Strong Indexical Theory, is that a person can be coherent and have inconsistent propositional attitudes because the person does not have to know the content of the name to understand the sentence. In other words, to be coherent the person only needs to understand the linguistic meaning of the name, that is, the reflexive truth conditions.

The weak version of the indexical theory, however, would be able to explain propositional attitudes in the same way. The weak version of this theory suggests that names are similar to indexicals because they have a reflexive truth condition. So the linguistic meaning of statement (7) is ‘Mary believes that the utterer of this sentence is tall’. Similarly, the linguistic meaning of statement (8) is that there is some person who is linked to the name ‘Tom Costigan’ through some naming convention, and that that person is tall. Since the Strong Indexical Theory of Names resolves this puzzle through an appeal to the linguistic meaning of a name and the reflexive truth conditions, the weak theory is also able to resolve the puzzle because the weak theory agrees that names have a linguistic meaning and reflexive truth conditions. Thus, the Strong Indexical Theory is not able to solve this puzzle in a way that is not available to the Weak Indexical Theory.

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<sup>21</sup> Pelczar and Rainsbury (1998) p. 306

However, since both theories suppose that names are directly referential, it suggests that neither theory is truly able to resolve this puzzle. Thus, even if the Strong Indexical Theory of Names was able to resolve this problem, there would be no reason to prefer it because the Weak Indexical Theory of Names is able to exploit the same strategies.

## **9. Objections and Replies**

Rami raises an objection to the Weak Indexical Theory of Names, which he calls the problem of shared names. He argues that homophonic ambiguous terms have different origins, histories, and meanings. By this he means that there are two different words with different meanings, but coincidentally have the same pronunciation (and spelling).<sup>22</sup> Rami says that for the Weak Indexical Theory of Names “different referents correspond to different meanings of a name”.<sup>23</sup> Thus he claims that in each naming ceremony there is a new name that is being used to refer to that object, albeit the same pronunciation and spelling as similar names. For instance, when a person is named ‘George’ at a naming ceremony this is a different name than the one given to any other person named George. To differentiate between these two names a subscripted number might be used. So, in this naming ceremony the person would be named ‘George<sub>N</sub>’. Thus he concludes that if names are ambiguous terms, then no two objects can have the very same name. Since we do think that two objects can have the same name, we should reject the notion that names are ambiguous terms.

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<sup>22</sup> In the principle of generosity, I take Rami to mean only homographic and homophonic words, so I will not consider heterotrophic examples of homophonic words.

<sup>23</sup> Rami p. 123

However, this objection is grounded in an equivocation between the kinds of meaning a term has. The Weak Indexical Theory of Names thinks that there is a linguistic meaning and a non-linguistic meaning of terms. An ambiguous term is ambiguous because it has different linguistic meanings. For example, the term ‘tap’ has more than one linguistic meaning or definition. It could mean, among other things, a faucet for drawing water from a pipe or a light touch or stroke. This word seems to have come from different histories and origins<sup>24</sup>, as Rami suggests, but coincidentally has the same pronunciation and spelling. On the other hand, names are ambiguous because they have different non-linguistic meanings. The non-linguistic meaning of a name is fixed to the object during the naming ceremony. So, the non-linguistic meaning of the name ‘George’ is different for each person who shares that name. Yet, the name has the same linguistic meaning, i.e. a person named George. So when two people share the same name this means that their names have the same linguistic meaning, but they have different non-linguistic meanings. Thus, Rami’s objection to the Weak Indexical Theory of Names is based on an equivocation between the different kinds of meanings a term or name can have.

Furthermore, the Weak Indexical Theory of Names does not claim that names are ambiguous terms. The theory, as propounded by Perry, argues that names are merely similar to ambiguous terms. Both ambiguous terms and names use context in a similar way, i.e. to narrow down the possible meanings of the term or name. But again, the difference between ambiguous terms and names is that the former has many linguistic

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<sup>24</sup> The former comes from Proto-Germanic (c. late 1400) the latter comes from Gallo-Roman (c. 1200). From <http://www.etymonline.com>



meanings while the latter has many non-linguistic meaning. Perry uses the term ambiguous for lack of a better word to draw a connection between names and ambiguous terms. This analogy is also meant to show that the use of context to determine the referent of a name is different from the use of context for an indexical term. Thus, the Weak Indexical Theory of Names offers a theory where names are similar to indexicals because of their reflexive character, and they are similar to ambiguous terms because of their use of context. Yet, the weak theory thinks that names are neither indexical nor ambiguous terms.

### **Conclusion**

The Indexical Theory of Names was developed to explain how the referent of a name can shift over time, like Madagascar. Although, the two alternative versions of the theory disagreed to what extent names are similar to indexicals. The Strong Indexical Theory of Names argues that names are indexicals because they are sensitive to the dubbing-in-force. On the other hand, the Weak Indexical Theory thinks that names were merely similar to indexicals, but more similar to ambiguous terms, because the role of context in determining the content. However, for the strong theory, if names are sensitive to the dubbing-in-force, then ambiguous terms are sensitive to the definition-in-force, and should be counted as indexicals. Furthermore, the meaning of an unambiguous term could change in the future, and similar to Madagascar, the meaning changes slowly over time. So, unambiguous terms should also be counted as indexicals. Yet indexicals are separated from all other terms because the meaning is singly conventional, while other terms and names are doubly conventional. Thus we come back to the Weak Indexical

Theory, where names are indexical-like, but they are more similar to ambiguous terms. Moreover, the strong theory claims to resolve the problem of propositional attitudes through an appeal to the linguistic meaning of a name and the reflexive truth conditions. Nevertheless the weak theory could also appeal to the same strategy for resolving this puzzle, because the weak theory agrees that names have a linguistic meaning and a reflexive truth condition. Finally, I respond to the shared names objection by saying that this objection is based on an equivocation between the linguistic and the non-linguistic meaning of a name. When two people share a name they share the linguistic meaning of the name and not the non-linguistic meaning. In the end, there is no reason to prefer the Strong Indexical Theory of Names as opposed to the Weak Indexical Theory, because the strong theory leads to the untenable consequence that all terms are indexical, and both the strong and the weak theories are able to resolve the problem of propositional attitudes in the same way.

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